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2013-04

# Nieto-Gomez Earns NPS Outstanding Professor Award

## Center for Homeland Defense and Security

Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California

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# Nieto-Gomez Earns NPS Outstanding Professor Award

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Science fiction and strategic planning have a lot in common, says Naval Postgraduate School Professor Rodrigo Nieto-Gomez.

"Good science fiction casts a light upon ourselves," Nieto-Gomez said while taking a break at Watkins Hall. "You modify a variable in society and see how people react to that variable. It's a new way of asking old questions. Planning is all about thinking into the future. Asking the 'what if...?' question multiple times."



His presentations on everything from cyber to border security are interspersed with allusions to future-thinking themes.

Infusing pop culture into academics is a classroom trademark for Nieto-Gomez, who earned the Naval Postgraduate School 2013 Lieutenant Commander David L. Williams Outstanding Professor Award at the Winter Quarter Awards Ceremony in March. The award is named in honor of Lieutenant Commander Williams, a Naval Postgraduate School alumnus who was killed in the September 11, 2001, attack on the Pentagon.

Nieto-Gomez began teaching at NPS and the Center for Homeland Defense and Security (CHDS) in 2007. At CHDS, he has taught Special Topics in American Government for Homeland Security as well as Strategic Planning and Budgeting for Homeland Security. Before entering academia he was an attorney specializing in legal issues relating to the North American Free Trade Agreement. The legal professional experience placed him on a unique perch to view security through a post-9/11 lens.

Among his specialties is the evolving nature of border security. While the border may remain static, the policy influences swirling around it are dynamic. Mexican President Enrique Pena, elected in 2012, has shifted the focus of Mexican-U.S. relations away from defusing violent drug gangs to emphasizing economic ties between the two nations. Nieto-Gomez suggests policy makers should view immigration similarly to how they see the movement of capital and goods, similar to how the Federal Reserve monitors currency flow.

"Humans move like capital but we don't have anyone thinking systemically about the flow of people," he said. "We're the most migratory species on earth."

While teaching border security issues he tells students to analyze any border on earth, while providing a theoretical framework of analysis. And, when teaching topics such as drug gangs, violence or immigration he pushes students to take the perspectives of all sides.

"How we deal with 'us versus them' is as essential to border security as the infrastructure," he noted.

True to the CHDS classroom approach, Nieto-Gomez prefers interaction to lecture. He refers to himself as a classroom "hacker," taking the system and manipulating it for an intended result.

"I think of myself as a learning-space architect," he said. "As a professor you create the learning space and shape in different ways. I don't see myself as the only vehicle for learning in my class. In a good classroom we all learn from each other".

A native of the city of San Luis Potosi in Mexico, he had earned his law degree in 2002 from Universidad Autonoma

de San Luis Potosi Law School. But shifting world events sparked a change in career direction. In 2004, he began studying for his master's degree in Geopolitics from the University of Paris, where he eventually earned his doctoral degree in 2009.

While pleased to be honored among his peers, Nieto-Gomez said his true measure of success is the student experience.

Asked about the award, he quipped: "I guess all the other candidates were furloughed."

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